THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • SATURDAY • APRIL 03, 2021 • ₹7.00 • PAGES 16 • LATE CITY EDITION

STATES CRACK THE WHIP

DELHI

Is witnessing the fourth wave of Covid-19 infection

Govt not planning a lockdown as of now

Fourth wave seems less serious than previous ones as there are fewer deaths and hospitalisations, says CM Arvind Kejriwal

MAHARASHTRA 47,827 CASES ACROSS STATE, 8,832 IN MUMBAI ON FRIDAY

- Eateries, bars and restaurants in Pune district ordered to be shut for seven days from Saturday
- Will order complete lockdown across state if situation doesn't improve in 2 days, says CM Uddhav Thackeray
- Children and youngsters constitute **47%** of new cases

Chhattisgarh

Lockdown in Durg district of the state from April 6-14

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2nd WAVE FAST-N-FURIOUS, 10 STATES FIGHTING INFECTION EXPLOSION

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA
@ New Delhi

AT least 10 states are fighting the fresh Covid-19 wave, according to government data. The second wave, which started in February in a handful of states led by Maharashtra, has now spread to more states. Till last month, it was Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat that were riding the second wave of the pandemic. But now, four more states — Madhya Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana — are showing alarming growth rates in active cases.

Worryingly, the seven-day moving average of the test positivity rate, which is 6.3% nationally, is seen rising in some states including West Bengal, Odisha, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Jharkhand.

Over the past 24 hours, the country has recorded 81,466 new cases taking the cumulative active cases to 6,14, 696 — the highest since October.

In the past 21 days, cases have zoomed from 18,377 (March 10) to 81,466 (April 1). In the first wave, which peaked in September last year, daily cases had jumped from 18,000 to 80,000-plus in 65 days. Trends suggest India may soon surpass the peak of 93,277 cases recorded on September 17.

Not just infections, Covid deaths are also rising. For more than a week now, the daily death count has been above 200. On April 1, this number touched a whopping 469.

Experts say the second wave could be more intense than the first one. The oft-cited reason for the infection explosion is the relaxed, careless behaviour by public and lax health administration. However, the role of mutant virus in driving the transmission is also under investigation.

According to Union Health Ministry data, eight states -- Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi and Uttar Pradesh – have shown a steep rise in cases. As much as 81.25% of the new cases are from these eight states. P8

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Gyms, pools to shut, 50 pc seating in theatres, hotels

State Govt announces strict measures in the light of rising Covid-19 cases in many districts

A health worker administers Covid vaccine to a woman, as part of the vaccination drive, at C V Raman Hospital in Bengaluru on Friday | MEGHANA SASTRY

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

HOURS after Union Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba reviewed the Covid-19 situation during a virtual meeting with Chief Secretaries of high-prevalence states, Karnataka on Friday announced a slew of measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus. The state has been witnessing a consistent rise in Covid-19 numbers even as large public gatherings and rallies continue to be held.

"The number of cases are rapidly increasing in Bengaluru, Kalaburgi, Bidar, Mysuru and other places. There will be no lockdown or night curfew, but measures will be taken to contain the spread," Karnataka Chief Secretary P Ravi Kumar said after the meeting.

Restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs and cinema halls will have to strictly stick to 50 per cent seating capacity in Bengaluru Urban and Rural districts, including BBMP area, Mysuru, Kalaburgi, Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Bidar and Hubballi-Dharwad, while gyms and swimming pools will remain completely shut. In case of any violation in pubs, bars or clubs, the facility shall be closed till the epidemic is over, a government order said.

The order further states that gyms, party halls, club houses, swimming pools will remain closed in apartment complexes. At places of worship, individuals are permitted to visit and offer prayers only, without having gatherings or functions.

Strict Covid-appropriate behaviour — like ensuring wearing of masks, physical distancing, provision of hand sanitiser — should be ensured in places like markets and department stores. These are part of the stringent measures taken by the State Government and will be in effect till April 20. Classes 6-9, including Vidyagama, shall remain suspended, but Classes 10, 11 and 12 will continue in the existing mode although attendance in person will not be mandatory. Classes for higher and professional courses will be suspended, except for those due for board/university examinations and health sciences. P3

TAMING THE VIRUS IN K'TAKA

Government's list of measures to check the virus spread

50% Restricted seating capacity at restaurants, pubs, bars, clubs and cinema halls

Classes 6-9, including Vidyagama, to be suspended, but Classes 10, 11, 12 to continue, but attendance in person not compulsory

Boarding schools to be closed, except for students of Classes 10,11, and 12, and higher and professional courses appearing in board/varsity exams and health sciences

Offering of prayers allowed only at places of worship, without gatherings

Gyms, party halls, club houses, swimming pools in apartment complexes and elsewhere to stay shut

FRIDAY FIGURES

4,991 State sees the highest daily spike so far

34,219 Active cases

10,06,229 TOTAL CASE TALLY

95.34% Recovery rate (1,631 discharged today)

4.64% Positivity rate

1.25% Mortality rate (6 more deaths, toll at 12,591)

Modi promises more med colleges in TN

SHOBANA RADHAKRISHNAN
@ Madurai

MADURAI will get a state-of-the-art All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Prime Minister Narendra Modi promised on Friday. Besides this, medical colleges will be set up at one in three districts of Tamil Nadu, more UG and PG seats will be offered, and medical and technical courses will be taught in local languages, he asserted.

Modi made these promises during a public meeting of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) at Amma Thidal here. Sharing the dais with Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami, Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam and other leaders, he began his campaign for the elections by chanting "*Vetri Vel Veera Vel*".

BJP functionaries from Madurai present a picture of Meenakshi Amman Temple to Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the city on Friday | KK SUNDAR

Alleging that the Congress and DMK have mastered the art of not working but spreading lies about those who work, he said, "One example is the issue of AIIMS. Despite being in power for many years, they didn't even think of bringing AIIMS to Madurai. It was our government that did it." Modi added that the project would ensure quality healthcare for people of the region.

The DMK and Congress pretend to be the only custodians of Tamil culture, but their actions contradict their words, he alleged, and added: "In 2011, the UPA came to power in Delhi. The same UPA government banned jallikattu. A UPA leader even called it a barbaric practice. In 2016, the TN Congress manifesto called for a ban on jallikattu. They should be ashamed of it." P5

EXPRESS READ

Eshwarappa defends letter to Governor

Bengaluru: Rural Development and Panchayatraj Minister K S Eshwarappa's defended his letter to Governor Vajubhai Vala, saying, "I am a loyal party man... I cannot be a mute spectator to what was happening in my department." P4

2 cops hurt in US as car rams Capitol barricade

Washington: A car rammed into two Capitol Police officers at a barricade outside the US Capitol on Friday, and the driver got out of the vehicle while appearing to brandish a knife before being shot by authorities. Both officers and the driver were taken to the hospital.

Forex reserves fall to $579.285 billion

Mumbai: The country's foreign exchange reserves declined by $2.986 billion to reach $579.285 billion in the week ended March 26, RBI data showed on Friday. In the previous week ended March 19, the forex kitty had increased by $233 million.

EC suspends 5, orders booth repoll

PRASANTA MAZUMDAR
@ Guwahati

THE Election Commission on Friday suspended five polling personnel, including a presiding officer, and ordered repoll at a polling booth in Assam after a polling team, travelling with polled EVMs in a car registered in the name of a BJP MLA's wife, was held hostage and allegedly attacked. A sub inspector of police tasked with escorting the polling party was also suspended for leaving them stranded and not ensuring their safe arrival at their destination.

With the incident triggering a flutter, the EC explained it was raining heavily and the polling party of No 149 Indira MV School of Ratabari seat was returning with escorts when the vehicle broke down and got detached from the convoy. While an alternative vehicle was being arranged, the polling party boarded a 'passing vehicle' without checking its ownership.

When the car slowed down in the traffic at Kanaishil in Karimganj around 10 pm, it was surrounded by about 50 people who started pelting stones. The mob abused the officials and did not allow the car to pass, the EC said.

The mob said the vehicle belonged to sitting MLA of Patharkandi and BJP candidate that Krishnendu Paul, and alleged the EVMs were being taken to be tampered with. Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra lit into it, saying the EC needs to start acting decisively on these complaints.

Moral policing: Youth stabbed in Mangaluru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mangaluru

A group of Bajrang Dal men allegedly attacked and stabbed a man, who was travelling to Bengaluru in a private bus along with his female friend, near Pumpwell here on Thursday night. The Mangaluru city police arrested four members of the Bajrang Dal on Friday and booked them for rioting, promoting enmity between communities, assault and attempt to murder. They were later produced before a local court.

Mangaluru City Police Commissioner N Shashi Kumar told the media said that Aswid Ansar Mohammed and his female friend Ashwini Shanubhag, who were classmates earlier, were heading to Bengaluru in search of a job. "The incident occurred around 9.30 pm on Thursday when a group of Bajrang Dal members stopped the bus in which the two were travelling, and assaulted and stabbed the man. The woman, aged 23, also has suffered injuries," the commissioner said.

The arrested are Balachandra (28) from Attavar, Dhanush Bhandary (25) from Kanduka, Jayaprashanth (27) from Shaktinagar and Anil Kumar (38) from Urwa. Dhanush, a history-sheeter, is facing four cases of murder. "In the last three months, as many as four such cases of attack have taken place. We are investigating into who instigated them to assault the duo," the police commissioner said. P5

Balachandra

Dhanush Bhandary

Jayaprashanth

Anil Kumar

Rejig in B'luru police likely with Pant's promotion

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

A change of guard in the city police force is likely this month-end with the scheduled promotion of incumbent Police Commissioner and Additional Director General of Police Kamal Pant as Director General of Police (DGP) on April 30.

Pant, an IPS officer of the 1990 batch, is also the senior-most ADGP in Karnataka, followed by his batchmate and former police commissioner Bhaskar Rao. With DGP (Training) P K Garg retiring on April 30, one post of DGP will fall vacant.

While there is speculation that the government may retain Pant as Bengaluru City police commissioner for some time at least, since he has not completed his one-year tenure, the names of the top contenders for the hot seat have already started doing the rounds. "Other than his promotion, there is no reason for the government to shift Pant from the commissioner's post. He is non-controversial and has provided clean administration in the city since his appointment as commissioner in August last year," said sources.

Meanwhile, the name of ADGP (Intelligence) B Dayanand, of the 1994 IPS batch, is a new addition, and of "considerable importance" to the list of officers who are in the race for the commissioner's post. Other than him, the names of ADGP (Law & Order) Pratap Reddy of the 1991 batch, ADGP (Fire & Emergency Services) Sunil Agarwal (1991) and ADGP (Recruitment & Training) Amrit Paul (1995) are in the reckoning," said sources.

No action against officials: Chief Secy gets HC notice

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

TAKING serious note of the lack of action against officials, the Karnataka High Court on Friday issued notice to the Chief Secretary and competent authorities/heads of various government departments. A division bench of Chief Justice Abhay Shreeniwas Oka and Justice Suraj Govindaraj was hearing a public interest petition filed by social activist Sai Datta seeking action against them for not acting on the reports of the Lokayukta or Upa Lokayuktas against erring public servants in as many as 342 cases.

Along with the chief secretary and heads of departments, the court also ordered notice to the Karnataka Lokayukta. The petitioner contended that Lokayukta and the two Upa Lokayuktas are empowered to investigate into the allegations or grievances relating to the conduct of public servants, including the Chief Minister, ministers, MLAs and also mal-administration, and submit a report to the competent authorities or heads of the departments concerned, under Section 12 of the Karnataka Lokayukta Act. The Lokayukta or Upa Lokayukta can also recommend action against erring public servants if the allegations are found to be true during enquiry.

The competent authorities/heads of the departments concerned should examine the report within three months and intimate the Lokayukta or Upa Lokayukta regarding the action taken or proposed to be taken against such public servants. However, the competent authorities have not acted upon the reports of the Lokayukta or Upa Lokayukta in 342 cases. CONTINUED ON: P5

PULWAMA

3 MILITANTS KILLED BY SECURITY FORCES

Three militants, including two who were involved in an attack on BJP leader Anwar Ahmed's house in Srinagar, were killed in an encounter with security forces on Friday in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama district, police said in a statement | P8

EMPOWERING WOMEN

It'll take 135.6 years to close global gender gap: WEF report

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE fear that the Covid-19 pandemic hit women the hardest across the globe and "raised new barriers to building inclusive and prosperous economies and societies" has been proved to be true in the just published 'Global Gender Gap Report -2021' by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The report states that the hardest hit sectors by lockdowns and "rapid digitalisation are those where women are more frequently employed. Combined with the additional pressures of providing care in the home, the crisis has halted progress toward gender parity in several economies and industries," writes Saadia Zahidi, managing director and head of the Centre for the New Economy and Society, WEF.

"Gender-sensitive recovery strategies will be critical in making up ground lost during 2020 to prevent long-term scarring in the labour market," cautions Zahidi.

The 15th edition of the WEF gender gap report is an index on 'gender parity' in 156 countries and is based on its graded evaluations on four broad benchmarks — women's participation in politics and economy and their access to health and education in each of these countries.

According to the report, South Asia is the "second lowest performer on the index after the Middle East and North Africa, with 62.3 per cent of its overall gender gap closed. The progress has been too slow in the recent past, and this year, it has actually reversed. The projected time needed for this region to close gender gaps is now estimated at 195.4 years," the report warns.

Globally, on the current trajectory, it will now take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide, the Global Gender Gap Report -2021 by the World Economic Forum (WEF) states.

India, the report suggests, is the "third worst performer in the region, having closed 62.5 per cent of its gap. Because of its large population, India's performance has a substantial impact on the region's overall performance. Home to 0.65 billion women, India has widened the gender gap from almost 66.8 per cent one year ago, to 62.5 per cent this year," the report noted.

CONTINUED ON: P5